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A Holy Ghost story

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Ghost stories abound this time of year. Civil War soldiers are reported hanging around former battlefields. Strange noises in old houses are attributed to specters. There was even a photograph in a recent newspaper identifying an iridescent round spot as proof of a ghostly presence. A Gallup poll shows belief in ghosts increasing from 25 percent of those polled in 1990 to 38 percent in 2001.

Since ancient times, some people have claimed to see or speak to spirits of the dead. It was called necromancy and was prohibited by God (see Lev. 19:31). But seeking advice from ghosts had an appeal. What if God seemed silent? Who better to ask than a familiar spirit?

Even King Saul tried it. When Saul was being obedient to God's commands, he cleared the kingdom of psychics. But when Saul disobeyed God, he no longer heard His voice. Or perhaps Saul didn't like what he heard. Either way, when a large Philistine force gathered to attack, Saul panicked. He sought advice from Samuel the prophet. The problem was, Samuel was dead. So Saul set out to find a medium. The encounter proved unsatisfactory. Samuel or his ghost pointed Saul back to God. Seeking a dead spirit instead of the living God couldn't and didn't save Saul.

Throughout the Old Testament, individuals found redemption when they repented and obeyed God's will. Instead of straying further from God by divination, they felt God's guidance through the Holy Spirit. Jacob, Jonah, Hezekiah, Esther were all saved by obeying God's commands, although at first unwilling.

In the New Testament, God communicates to men and women by the presence of the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost. This communion was often beyond words. It was a tangible feeling of divine presence. Mary the mother of Jesus felt the presence of the Holy Ghost. When Jesus was

baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist, Jesus was filled with the Holy Ghost.

The followers of Jesus were baptized with the Holy Ghost. As John said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt. 3:11).

Jesus purified his followers with an increased understanding of God. He showed them that God was divine Spirit and that God was good and perfect and that He loved them. Jesus illustrated his teachings with demonstrations of divine power. He healed the sick and raised the dead. He encouraged his followers to trust God, Spirit, in times of trouble.

Jesus gave them spiritual understanding to combat doubt, fear, and even discouragement. This spiritual understanding eventually transformed them. The coming of the Holy Ghost brings this awakened spiritual understanding.

At his ascension, Jesus urged his disciples not to give up praying and trying to understand life spiritually. He told them they would be baptized with the Holy Ghost and feel the divine presence with them (see Acts 1:1-5). And so it happened.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost filled them. Everyone present, although speaking different languages, understood what the disciples were saying. The Holy Ghost or divine presence was giving spiritual understanding to anyone willing to receive it. And it's said that 3,000 people repented of their ignorance or doubt regarding Christ Jesus and united with his followers. They continued their search for spiritual understanding until they received the Holy Ghost.

Halloween, for me, isn't a day of ghouls and ghosts. It's a day of choice, choice between dead spirits and the living God, between ghosts or the Holy Ghost, between divination or eternal salvation. With every mention of spirits, I deepen my commitment to increase my spiritual understanding. Even if someone feels cut off from God or doesn't understand God's nature, the effort to seek God's will blesses the seeker.

Seeking spiritual understanding and being willing to change makes a person receptive. Everyone is capable of feeling the divine presence and of being filled with the Holy Ghost.